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# Genre Expectations and the Superscriptions of LXX Isaiah

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## 1 Introduction

This article examines the treatment of the superscriptions in LXX Isa 1:1, 2:1, and 13:1.<sup>1</sup> In the absence of any textual evidence indicating a *Vorlage* substantially different from the MT or the presence of interpolations in the Greek textual tradition, the differences between the Greek and Hebrew versions are taken as interpretative moves of the translator. After a brief discussion about genre and the LXX, the article presents a parallel translation of the superscriptions followed by an analysis of the exegetical points that are most pertinent to my argument.

The analysis suggests that the translator attempted to bring the three superscriptions into closer formal alignment. Yet, there is one significant deviation that breaks this pattern. I argue that these contradictory procedures result from the translator's attempt to conform with certain expectations regarding the genre of prophetic texts.

## 2 Genre Expectations and the LXX

Evidently, the conceptualization of genre in the context of LXX Isaiah is different from that of contemporary definitions, but here I am not using the word »genre« in terms of modern scholarly catalogues of literary characteristics, but in the Bakhtinian sense of certain discursive regularities that allow for the understand-

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<sup>1</sup> The last clause of Isa 1:1, *בִּימֵי עֲזִיָּהוּ יוֹתֵם אֶחָד יִחְזָקוּהוּ מִלְכֵי יִהוּדָה*, does not have a parallel structure in 2:1 or 13:1, and is this immaterial for our analysis.

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ing, reception, and transmission of texts in a given social context.<sup>2</sup> In this perspective, to speak of genre is to evoke certain recurring elements of texts which guide the expectations of readers and delimit the possibilities of writers.<sup>3</sup> The analysis of the superscriptions of LXX Isaiah indicates that genre expectations also inform and condition translations.

While ancient readers did not approach the texts we label »prophetic« with the same categories that we have in mind today, they had their own expectations regarding how these texts should function.<sup>4</sup> These expectations are related with content (e. g. prophecy as revelatory speech, elements of prediction, etc.) but also with form. Ancient and modern readers are conditioned to anticipate typical vocabulary, peculiar phrases, and other formal indicators that allow them to identify the type of text they are reading. It should be no surprise that the LXX translator would also be influenced by these expectations.

Recently, Jennifer Dines has demonstrated how the language of the Greek Pentateuch and Minor Prophets displays elements that attempt to reproduce the generic characteristics of literature and other higher registers of discourse.<sup>5</sup> John A. Lee has convincingly shown that the Isaiah translator has a tendency to use language that is characteristic of literary Greek, through the use of vocabulary and turns of phrase that are typical of classical literature.<sup>6</sup> A close comparison

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**2** For a definition, see Mikhail Bakhtin, »The Problem of Speech Genres,« in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986): 60–102. An account of Bakhtin's genre theory surpasses the limits of this article. It suffices to say that the heuristic potential of this idea for exploring the history of biblical interpretation is largely unexplored. There are some applications of the theory to the study of the biblical text itself, which can be exemplified by the articles collected in Roland Boer, ed., *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, Semeia 63 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

**3** Tzvetan Todorov, »The Notion of Literature,« in *Genres in Discourse*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 1–12, 10 f.

**4** On this issue, John Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986), 141–153, represents an early attempt to account for the differences between modern and ancient perceptions of genre, but his strict and limiting definition of genre hinders his analysis. More helpful attempts to account for the evolution of generic perception and its impact on scriptural interpretation are offered by George J. Brooke, »Genre Theory, Rewritten Bible and Peshet,« *DSD* 17 (2010): 361–386, reprinted in *Reading the Dead Sea Scrolls: Essays in Method* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013): 113–135, and Moshe J. Bernstein, »The Dead Sea Scrolls and Jewish Biblical Interpretation in Antiquity: A Multi-Genre Perspective,« in *Reading and Rereading Scripture at Qumran* (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 387–420.

**5** Jennifer Dines, »Grand Words for Grand Subjects: Bureaucratic and Literary Influences in the Style of the Septuagint,« *Semitica et Classica* 5 (2012): 69–81.

**6** John A. L. Lee, »The Literary Greek of Septuagint Isaiah,« *Semitica et Classica* 7 (2014): 135–146.

of the superscriptions in MT and LXX Isaiah indicates that the Greek translator might also have been influenced by vocabulary and syntax that characterize prophetic texts.

### 3 Parallel Translations

#### LXX Isa 1:1a

MT	LXX
<p>חזון -- ישׁהוּ בן־אִמּוֹץ אֲשֶׁר הָזָה עַל־יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם</p>	<p>ὄρασις ἦν εἶδεν Ἡσαίας υἱὸς Ἀμώς ἦν εἶδεν κατὰ τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ κατὰ Ἰερουσαλημ</p>
<p>Vision of Isaiah, son of Amoz, that he saw about Judah and Jerusalem.</p>	<p>Vision <i>that</i> Isaiah, son of Amos, <i>saw</i>, that he saw against Judea and <i>against</i> Jerusalem.</p>

#### LXX Isa 2:1

MT	LXX
<p>הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר חָזָה יִשְׁעִיָהוּ בֶן־אִמּוֹץ עַל־יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם</p>	<p>ὁ λόγος ὁ γενόμενος παρὰ κυρίου πρὸς Ἡσαίαν υἱὸν Ἀμώς περὶ τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ περὶ Ἰερουσαλημ</p>
<p>The word that Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw about Judah and Jerusalem.</p>	<p>The word that <i>came from the Lord to</i> Isaiah, son of Amos, concerning Judea and <i>concerning</i> Jerusalem.</p>

#### LXX Isa 13:1

MT	LXX
<p>מִשָּׁא בְּבָבֶל אֲשֶׁר חָזָה יִשְׁעִיָהוּ בֶן־אִמּוֹץ</p>	<p>ὄρασις -- ἦν εἶδεν Ἡσαίας υἱὸς Ἀμώς κατὰ Βαβυλῶνος</p>
<p>Burden of Babylon that Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw.</p>	<p>Vision that Isaiah, son of Amos, saw <i>against</i> Babylon.</p>

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 Three Attempts at Formal Alignment of the Superscriptions

There are three indications of an attempt to standardize or align the form of the superscriptions. The first is the translation of **מִשָּׁא** as ὄρασις in 13:1. The renderings of חזון by ὄρασις (1:1) and הדבר by ὁ λόγος (2:1) are unremarkable. The choice of ὄρασις for 1:31 (**מִשָּׁא**) is peculiar in the broader context of the Greek versions, but fits well with the practices of the Isaiah translator. Outside LXX Isaiah, **מִשָּׁא** with the sense of »oracle«, is only rendered as ἀἴμμα (4 Kgdms 9:25; Jer 23:33–34, 36, 38; Nah 1:1; Hab 1:1; Zech 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1; Lam 2:14).<sup>7</sup> In LXX Isaiah, ἀἴμμα is never used. The equivalences are evenly distributed, four times with ῥῆμα (14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 22:1), three times with ὄραμα (21:1, 11; 23:1) and ὄρασις (13:1; 19:1; 30:6). The choice in 13:1 could have been prompted by the clause **אִשְׁרַח חִזֵּה** and the intention to better align this verse with 1:1.

The second is the treatment of the nominal complements indicating the recipients of the prophetic oracle. The phrase **עַל־יְהוּדָה וּירוּשָׁלַם** serves this function in both 1:1 and 2:1. In Greek, both verses repeat the preposition before the last word (ἰερουσαλημ), thus creating the structurally similar κατὰ τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ κατὰ Ἰερουσαλημ (1:1) and περὶ τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ περὶ Ἰερουσαλημ (2:1).<sup>8</sup> In 13:1, instead of translating the construct chain **מִשָּׁא בְּבָל** literally with a genitive clause, the translator employs the prepositional phrase κατὰ Βαβυλῶνος and moves the clause to the end of the verse. This syntactical choice creates a complement that is formally in line with the ones in 1:1 and 2:1. Thus, taken together, the rendering of the three headings indicates an intention to align their syntactical form, while remaining aware of the immediate context of each passage in terms of lexical choices.

Finally, there is the translation of **אִשְׁרַח חִזֵּה** in 1:1 and 13:1. The clause ἦν εἰῶθεν corresponds literally to **אִשְׁרַח חִזֵּה** in 1:1 and 13:1. It is noteworthy that in 1:1 it appears twice against a single occurrence of the corresponding Hebrew phrase.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The only three exceptions are either a result from mistranslation (**הַמִּשָּׁא** as πάντες in 2 Chr. 24:27) or of free renderings (Isa 21:13; Ezek 12:10).

<sup>8</sup> The choice of equivalents for **עַל** seems to be idiomatically sensitive. The translator uses κατὰ (»against«) in 1:1, as the superscription is followed by a judgment oracle, and περὶ in 2:1, as the superscription is followed by a salvation oracle. On the contextual sensitivity in the choice of prepositions for the headings in LXX Isa 1:1 and 2:1, see Rodrigo F. de Sousa, *Eschatology and Messianism in LXX Isaiah 1–12* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 23 f., n. 35, and H. G. M. Williamson, *Isaiah 1–6* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 12.

<sup>9</sup> The textual witnesses of LXX Isa do not have any indication of a later interpolation, according to the critical apparatus compiled by Joseph Ziegler, *Isaias* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983).

The second occurrence in this verse is a literal translation. The first is a plus, added between ὄρασις and Ησαίας. The translator preferred to represent חזון ישׂיהו with a relative clause rather than with a subjective genitive, possibly for stylistic reasons (conceivably to avoid a Hebraism). The repetition of ἦν εἶδεν is in line with the translator's tendency to repeat certain expressions in subsequent clauses, and could also serve the goal to harmonize the form of the verse with that of 13:1.<sup>10</sup>

## 4.2 A Deviation from the Pattern

In 2:1, however, the relative clause ἄσρ הזה does not have the equivalent ἦν εἶδεν as in 1:1 and 13:1. Instead, we have the phrase ὁ γενόμενος παρὰ κυρίου πρὸς (Ησαίαν) »that came from the Lord to (Isaiah)«, which changes the syntax and sense of the verse considerably.

It is possible that the *Vorlage* read ἄσρ היה instead of ἄσρ הזה. In which case, the preposition πρὸς could also indicate the presence of אֶל-, a preposition that normally follows ἄσρ היה in the Hebrew text. However, there is no textual evidence that suggests a *Vorlage* with this reading.<sup>11</sup> If the *Vorlage* read as the MT at this point, the translator's misreading would have originated in the graphic similarity between ἄσρ היה and ἄσρ הזה.<sup>12</sup> While this simple misreading is not an example of an intentional »theological modification« it could have been influ-

<sup>10</sup> Mirjam van der Worm-Croughs, *The Old Greek of Isaiah: an Analysis of its Pluses and Minuses* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 104 f., is possibly correct in arguing that the creation of a relative clause to represent the Hebrew construct state in this verse has the goal of avoiding a Hebraism. She also points to the translator's practice to repeat expressions in subsequent clauses (citing 23:6–7 and 41:25) and to the possibility that the plus may indicate an analogy with 13:1 (pp. 167 f.).

<sup>11</sup> A comparison with 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> shows that the only difference between this manuscript and the MT is in the spelling of the proper names ישׂעיה and ירושלים. The other Qumran manuscripts that contain Isa 2:1 (4QIsa<sup>a</sup>; 4QIsa<sup>b</sup>; 4QIsa<sup>c</sup>; 4QIsa<sup>d</sup>) do not present substantial differences. For surveys and overviews on the text of Isaiah in Qumran, see Joseph Ziegler, »Die Vorlage der Isaias–Septuaginta (LXX) und die erste Isaias–Rolle von Qumran (1QIs<sup>a</sup>)«, *JBL* 78/1 (1959): 34–59 and Dwight D. Swanson, »The Text of Isaiah at Qumran,« in *Interpreting Isaiah: Issues and Approaches*, ed. David G. Firth and Hugh G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009): 191–212.

<sup>12</sup> This would qualify as a »first-level inadvertent error«, which is somewhat frequent in LXX Isaiah, according to Donald W. Parry, »LXX Isaiah or its *Vorlage*: Primary ›Misreadings‹ and Secondary ›Modifications‹,« in *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. Vanderkam*, ed. Eric F. Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2011): 151–168.

enced by the word דבר, which would have triggered certain reminiscences of prophetic texts with which the translator was familiar.<sup>13</sup>

The choice not to use the literal ἦν εἶδεν found in 1:1 and 13:1 could indicate that the translator did not think appropriate to connect דבר and חזה. Although in the Hebrew Bible it is not uncommon for a prophetic word to be »seen«, there are cases in which Greek translators seem to eschew the connection. For example, in LXX Jer 2:31 דבר יהוה ראו becomes ἀκούσατε λόγον κυρίου.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the translator could have been influenced by the memory of other prophetic texts that feature דבר in connection with the relative clause אשר היה. The book of Jeremiah has the closest parallel to the form of LXX Isa 2:1. The phrase יהוה האשר יהיה אל-ירמיהו מאת יהוה appears in Jer 7:1; 11:1; 18:1; 21:1; 25:1; 30:1; 32:1; 34:1,8; 35:1; 40:1; 44:1. The LXX consistently translates all these instances as ὁ λόγος ὁ γενόμενος παρὰ κυρίου πρὸς Ἰερεμίαν. The similarity between the Greek texts of these verses in Jeremiah and Isa 2:1 suggests to Ziegler that the translation of Jeremiah precedes that of Isaiah.<sup>15</sup> Yet, since these are very literal translations of the phrase, a judgment on the relative dates of these versions is difficult. In this case, an influence from the Hebrew text is also possible and likely.

Reminiscences of the Hebrew text of the Twelve can also be detected. The clause אשר היה qualifies דבר (appearing in the construct דבר-יהוה) in the superscription formulas of Hos 1:1, Mic 1:1, and Zeph 1:1, all of which have, in Hebrew, syntactical structures similar to Isa 1:1 and 2:1. The treatment of these three superscriptions in the Twelve is not uniform in Greek. LXX Hos 1:1 and Zeph 1:1 follow the Hebrew closely, and translate אשר היה as ὃς ἐγγενήθη. LXX Mic 1:1, which is not a literal translation, represents the form by καὶ ἐγένετο.

As in Isa 2:1, all three versions use a form of the verb γίνομαι. But the formal differences in each example speak against direct literary dependence between the Greek texts (in any direction). Conversely, γίνομαι does speak in favor of some level of reminiscence of אשר היה by the Greek translator, who employed a current Greek term used to express the reception of the divine word by the prophets. This

13 In which case, this could be an antecedent of the later rabbinic technique of *al tigre*. For a discussion on how this technique could be reflected in other LXX translations (with a focus on readings that presuppose different vocalizations without altering the consonantal text), see Zvi Ron, »Septuagint Readings as Additional Exegetical Layers,« *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 46/2 (2018): 124–128.

14 But cf. Jer 38:21 (LXX 45:21), where דבר אשר הראני יהוה becomes ὁ λόγος ὃν ἔδειξεν μοι κύριος.

15 Joseph Ziegler, *Untersuchungen zur Septuaginta des Buches Isaias* (Münster: Verlag der aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1934), 105. He does however, makes important caveats, given the complexity of the issues involved in such decisions.

suggests that we are not dealing with direct literary borrowing, but with a global reminiscence of the content of the Twelve, most likely in Hebrew, expressed with familiar vocabulary. The addition of *παρὰ κυρίου* in LXX Isa 2:1, while closer to the form *מֵאֵת יְהוָה* of the Jeremiah passages, could also suggest an influence of the Hebrew text of the Twelve. The superscriptions of Hosea, Micah, and Zephaniah all feature the construct *דְּבַר־יְהוָה*, translated as *λόγος κυρίου* in the three occurrences.<sup>16</sup>

My contention is that since the translator is presumably familiar with prophetic literature, general reminiscences of the language and content of the prophetic books could have influenced his translation, not necessarily implying a direct borrowing from a specific text.<sup>17</sup> The form of LXX Isa 2:1 (especially with the free addition of *παρὰ κυρίου*) reflects certain expectations of the translator regarding what could appropriately figure in a prophetic superscription. The reference to the Lord in the added prepositional phrase of the Greek Isaiah shows that the translator sees his superscription as pertaining to the same discursive domain as other headings in prophetic books.<sup>18</sup> It is in this sense that we may speak of expectations of genre. The translator treats his *Vorlage* as a prophetic word »from the Lord«, as is the case with the other prophetic books that are part of his cognitive and discursive milieu.

The form of the text points to the independence of the Greek versions. In other words, the Greek versions of Isaiah and the Twelve belong to a similar cultural and religious world, but we would not be able to ascertain any literary relation-

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16 Henri Cazelles, »Texte massorétique et Septante en Is. 2,1–5,« in *Festschrift Dominique Barthélemy*, ed. Pierre Casetti (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981) 51–59, 53, also noted that the formula employed in LXX Isa 2:1 is inspired by the titles of Hos 1:1, Mic 1:1, and Zeph 1:1, and commented the possible influence of Jeremiah.

17 This could point in the direction of the usefulness of a reformulated idea of »analogical hermeneutics« (*herméneutique analogique*), by means of which the translator was influenced by other texts in his renderings, as proposed by Jean Koenig, *L'Herméneutique analogique du judaïsme antique d'après les témoins textuels d'Isaïe* (Leiden: Brill, 1982). In spite of the strong (and justifiable) criticisms of authors such as Arie van der Kooij, »Accident or Method? On »Analogical« Interpretation in the Old Greek of Isaiah and in 1QIsa,« *BO* 43 (1986): 366–375, and David Baer, *When We All Go Home: Translation and Theology in LXX Isaiah 56–66* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), the model offers important insights that could be explored further, if combined with a proper theory of genre. The renewed model could expand the idea of analogical interpretation to include reminiscences of generic characteristics and not simply of specific texts.

18 I use the word »books« in a general sense, without specific implications, taking into account the important work of Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).



ship between them, at least not based on these verses alone.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, I propose that echoes of Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah do not necessarily mean that the translator drew directly and intentionally from any specific passage to make a formal intertextual allusion. Rather, they indicate a previous knowledge of these texts in Hebrew, which became part of his general frame of reference with regard to what constitutes a prophetic text and what kinds of words and phrases could appropriately appear in them.

## 5 Conclusion

The present analysis suggested that there is a drive towards formal standardization in the rendering of the superscriptions in LXX Isaiah. This is visible in the translation of מִשָּׁא as ὄρασις in 13:1, in the attempts to align the placement and form of the complements in 1:1, 2:1, and 13:1, and in the addition of the relative clause ἣν εἶδεν in 1:1, bringing it closer to 13:1.

Yet, in spite of the indications of an attempt to standardize the superscriptions, the rendering of the phrase אֲשֶׁר חִזָּה in 2:1 contains an important deviation. I argued that this could signal the misreading אֲשֶׁר הָיָה prompted by the graphic similarity between the Hebrew words, read in the light of the immediate content of the verse and the broader interpretative universe of the translator, which impelled reminiscences of formal elements of the Hebrew text of the prophetic books.

My proposal is that these seemingly contradictory procedures in fact work together to craft superscriptions that are formally coherent and that reproduce expected characteristics of prophetic texts. For this reason, they can be described in terms of the translator's sensitivity to genre. His concern to render the superscriptions with a somewhat consistent form was overruled by the introjection of reminiscences of set forms and crystalized phrases characteristic of prophetic texts, though not necessarily of any text in particular. Together, both procedures indicate an overarching concern to produce a version that, in his mind, read and sounded like a prophetic text should.

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<sup>19</sup> Isaac Leo Seeligmann, *The Septuagint Version of Isaiah: a Discussion of its Problems* (Leiden: Brill, 1948), 72–73, argued that LXX Twelve is earlier than LXX Isaiah. He points to texts such as LXX Isa 2:6 (LXX Amos 9:14); 13:22 (LXX Hab 2:3); 17:1–2 (LXX Zeph 2:9); 25:6 (LXX Amos 6:6); 45:13 (LXX Amos 9:14). The present analysis of the superscriptions does not take this position as definitive and broadens the discussion.

**Abstract:** This article examines the translations of the superscriptions in LXX Isa 1:1, 2:1, and 13:1. The analysis reveals some attempts to bring the three superscriptions into closer formal alignment, and one significant deviation that breaks this pattern. These apparently contradictory procedures seem to result from the translator's attempt to conform with certain expectations regarding the genre of prophetic texts.

**Key Words:** Septuagint; Isaiah; superscriptions; interpretation; prophetic texts; genre

**Résumé:** Cet article examine les traductions des titres en LXX Es 1,1; 2,1 et 13,1. L'analyse révèle quelques tentatives de rapprocher la forme des trois titres et un écart significatif qui départ de ce schéma. Ces procédures apparemment contradictoires semblent résulter de la tentative du traducteur de se conformer à certaines attentes concernant le genre des textes prophétiques.

**Mots-clés:** Septante; Esaïe; titres; interprétation; textes prophétiques; genre

**Zusammenfassung:** Dieser Artikel untersucht die Übersetzungen der Überschriften in LXX Jes 1,1, 2,1 und 13,1. Die Analyse zeigt einige Versuche, die drei Überschriften in eine engere formale Ausrichtung zu bringen, sowie eine signifikante Abweichung, die dieses Muster durchbricht. Diese scheinbar widersprüchlichen Vorgehensweisen scheinen sich aus dem Versuch des Übersetzers zu ergeben, bestimmte Erwartungen hinsichtlich der Gattungen prophetischer Texte zu erfüllen.

**Schlagwörter:** Septuaginta; Jesaja; Überschriften; Auslegung; prophetische Texte; Gattung

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